

Humanity instead of Perfection

Garth Fagan, who scored a world hit with his choreography for “The Lion King” is a guest at the Innsbruck DanceSummer festival with his international company.

Innsbruck – High Noon in an Innsbruck Hotel. The interview with Garth Fagan should have started ten minutes ago. But the choreographer, who was born in Jamaica and lives in NY is taking his time – and first spruces up a bit. After all, a photographer is present and Fagan is a tad vain. But he may be officially granted his academic 15 minutes¹. For 34 years Fagan has passed on his knowledge about the art of dance (literally “body art” = Körperkunst) at Brockport University in NY. He has guided countless students into the world of dance. Fagan came to Innsbruck for the DanceSummer festival, where, starting today, his company will present five pieces, which have never been seen in Austria before. Instead, Mister Fagan can now be seen. In a flashy flowery shirt, black leather jacket, and a cool hat he strolls across the hotel lobby. Almost as if he wants to ask somebody to dance.

Innsbruck is giving him the mountains

Fagan discovered the world of dance at a young age for himself – and has not left it since. At the age of 16, still in Jamaica, he dove into the universe of movement. He has not emerged since. “Dance is my life” the 69-year old raves. The New Yorker does not look his seven decades. His gaze is mischievous, his laugh youthful. Apparently, dancing keeps you young. “I love to develop new steps and movements – and to break the rules” says Fagan, who has garnered world fame and numerous honors for his choreography for the Broadway musical “The Lion King.”

Did he expect such a break-through success back then? Fagan nods and giggles. “The entire crew worked incredibly hard back then. We wanted to create a very specific dance experience- and the enthusiastic audience response during the first few minutes of the pre-premiere in Minneapolis proved that we had reached our goal.”

¹ This refers to a custom at German and Austrian universities, where all lectures and seminars officially begin 15 minutes after the posted hour.

Suddenly, he raves about Innsbruck, which reminds him of Jamaica. "I grew up with mountains and rivers. It's simply fantastic." Fagan is becoming downright euphoric.

But it's not just the Tyrolian landscape that pleases the king of the dance floor. The local cuisine makes him enthusiastic: "You have the best desserts in the world. I am crazy about Sacher Torte with whipped cream."

"Dance is my life. I love to develop new steps and movements – and to break the rules"

Of course the members of his company would not be able to partake in such calorie bombs. A dancer must be graceful and perfect. Or not? Fagan brushes away such clichés: "I am too mature to believe in perfection. I love people of different body types and skin colors. The world is diverse after all." He slides deeper into his comfy chair and launches into praise of Barack Obama. The American president has impressed Fagan, who will celebrate the 40th anniversary of his company next year. "He has lead us into a new era – and also mobilized the youth. Because they realize how much depth he has." enthuses the choreographer. And somehow one senses his heart dancing.